

Strengthen Community Service

a) Maine Commission on Community Service

Enabling Legislation

5 MRSA §7501: Establishes the Maine Commission for Community Service to foster the State's ethic of community service by encouraging community service and volunteerism as a means of meeting critical human, environmental, educational and public safety needs throughout the State. The Commission also serves as the State's liaison regarding national and community service and volunteer activities; fosters collaboration among service agencies; receive gifts and grants, implements statewide service programs, and makes sub grants to state and local entities.

5 MRSA § 7504: Assigns the responsibility to SPO to provide staff and administrative services to the Commission on Community Service.

USC 42, Chapter 129, Section 12638 (a) (1): Requires states to maintain a State Commission on National and Community Service in accordance with federal requirements in order to be eligible to receive national service grants and allotments.

Positions that Contribute to this Responsibility

- (1) Policy Development Specialist
- (2) Senior Planners
- (1) Clerk Typist III
- Shared Administrative Support

Description

When President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps in 1961, he said, "The wisdom of this idea is that someday we'll bring it home to America." The Corporation for National Service carries on a long tradition of citizen involvement.

Created in 1993 with bipartisan support from Congress, the President, and community groups nationwide, the Corporation for National Service engages Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service that strengthens communities. At the same time, Congress created a model of federal volunteer and community service resources for use by states. To participate, states are required to establish State Service Commissions comprised of volunteers. The Legislature created the Maine Commission on Community Service (MCCS) in 1995 and placed it within the State Planning Office. The missions of State Planning Office and the MCCS are compatible, particularly with in the areas of long-range planning, identification of emerging issues, and interagency coordination.

Maine's 26-member commission represents the State's varied community service and volunteer sectors. The Commission is required to:

- develop and communicate a statewide vision of service and foster an ethic of

- community service and volunteering throughout the State
- develop an infrastructure that supports national service programs [through grants] and effectively manages Commission activities;
- support local programs and ensure they are high quality; and
- develop a State Plan with input from interested members of the public.

The Commission does not directly operate volunteer programs in communities, rather it funds activities that: 1) engages citizens as volunteers in delivering a service to meet a critical local need; 2) provides assistance to help volunteer groups perform better; 3) connects groups doing similar work so they can exchange information and help each other; 4) persuades experts to donate their services to groups that cannot afford to pay for them; and 5) helps communities operate volunteer programs or recruit more volunteers. What distinguishes MCCC from other organizations is its responsibility for building capacity in organizations to do their work in a sustainable fashion.

In recent years, these activities have included by way of example:

- developing **Maine's Promise** (the state equivalent of America's Promise) in partnership with the Children's Cabinet and its Communities for Children initiative to engage the private sector to expand services for youth and families;
- organizing **statewide community training programs** that focused on positive youth development;
- designing the **Maine Service Exchange** that uses volunteer consultants to provide free assistance to nonprofit community service programs;
- developing the **Martin Luther King grant program** to fund youth community service projects; and
- creating the **Maine Mentoring Partnership** that connects local mentoring programs and allows them to share information.

The Commission, together with the Maine Department of Education and the Corporation for National Service, administers grants for three community service programs: AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and National Senior Service Corps. Known as the domestic Peace Corps, AmeriCorps provides opportunities for individuals to serve their communities. They receive a one-year stipend and, at the end of service, qualify for an education award that pays post-secondary education expenses. Since its inception, 1,500 Maine citizens have completed their AmeriCorps service and have qualified for nearly \$4 million in financial aid for higher education. Learn and Serve provides grants to schools, colleges, and community organizations to develop service-learning programs for Maine students. The National Senior Service Corps looks to senior citizens for Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and the Retired Senior and Volunteer Program.

As a result of SPO's community service work, more people in Maine are volunteering in their communities. According to General Colin Powell, spokesman for America's Promise, Maine has done some "of the most impressive community mobilization work in the country."

Progress towards Goals and Objectives

To achieve its goal of stimulating the development of the State's economy and the conservation of its natural resources, SPO's strives to strengthen community governance and delivery of services through the use of volunteers. SPO measures its performance by tracking the percentage of Maine adults who donate time outside of their regular family or work activities for community service.

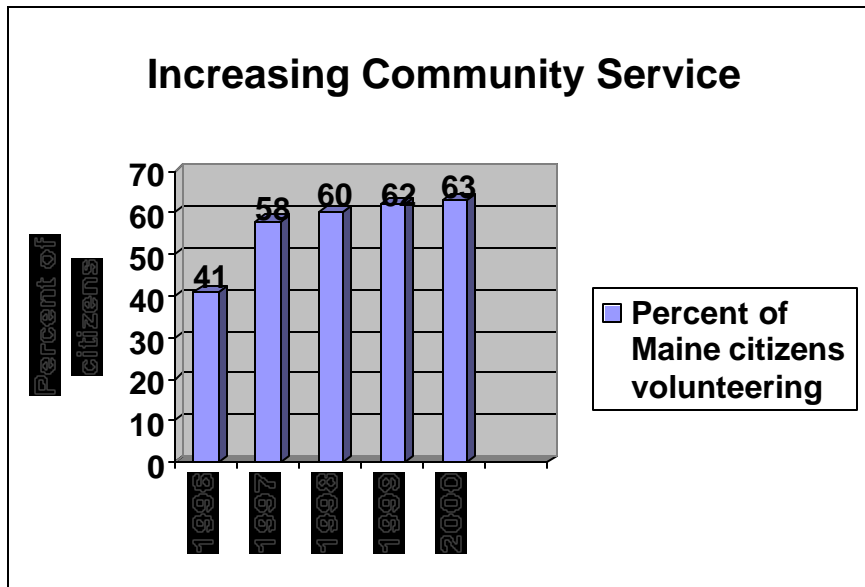


Figure 8: SPO hopes to increase this rate by two percentage points per year

Assessment of Progress

Over the past three years, the rate of adults volunteering in Maine has remained quite high, but has increased only slightly. Maine is fortunate that the percentage of adults who volunteer is significant; but efforts to increase the number of citizens who do sustained volunteer work (mentoring, coaching, hospice, firefighting, etc.) rather than episodic work (walkathons, clean up days, playground construction, loon counts, etc.) will be thwarted if a statewide system of connecting those who want to volunteer with those that need volunteers is not developed. MCCS has made this a top priority as a strategy for increasing the number of citizen volunteers in Maine.

In addition to adults, the Commission intends to increase youth service. In 2000, 48% of high school students said they volunteered in their schools or communities.

Performance Outputs for 2000

- 8,165 citizen volunteers served as mentors, teachers, water quality monitors, and safety educators in Americorp grant programs
- 224 AmeriCorps volunteers earned \$2 million in education awards for their service
- 34 private consultants contributed at least 10 hours annually to advise and assist small volunteer service organizations across Maine as part of the Maine Service Exchange;

- \$1.5 million awarded to Maine organizations for operation of AmeriCorps programs;
- 22 volunteer projects were carried out by 991 youth in conjunction with Martin Luther King Day
- 510 individuals were trained on 22 separate topics related to operating a community service program; 75% rated the training as *Excellent*
- National Service programs in Maine rated their satisfaction with MCCA service as strong in the areas of providing a vision of service (97%), responding in a timely manner to calls (90%), and providing technical assistance and training (83%).

Other Evaluative Processes

- *Legislative Oversight*: The Commission submits an Annual Report to the Governor and the Legislature's State and Local Government Committee.
- *Pre-Audit Review*: In October 2000, the Inspector General assigned to the Corporation for National Service conducted an on-site pre-audit review. The Inspector General's report identified three issues it felt the Commission should address, none of the issues were material findings and the Corporation for National Service agreed that no corrective actions were required.
- *Accreditation*: In May 2001, the Corporation for National Service conducted an accreditation review based on 11 Administrative Standards covering the responsibilities mandated for State Service Commissions. Each standard has a series of subsections adding up to a total of 100 elements. The Commission passed on all but three. SPO and the Commission are working to correct these three elements that involve documenting grant closeouts and submitting timely financial reports.
- *State Service Plan*: Every 3 years, the Commission develops a comprehensive state service plan to identify "top issues" that impact the entire state. The plan, which is developed with broad public input, sets priorities for targeting resources and is the basis for the Commission's work.
- *Advisory Groups*: The Commission also convenes groups from the volunteer field to advise it on project design. These advisory groups represent those who are affected and will benefit from any programs or actions taken. For example, the MCCA worked with 160 young people (high school and middle school) as well as 60 adults to identify the focus for youth service programs.
- *Special Studies*: MCCA evaluated Maine's unique, "dispersed crew" model for structuring local AmeriCorp projects and found it to be highly effective. In addition, MCCA received funding from the Corporation for National Service to study the long-term economic impact of AmeriCorps members' service in communities. This study is to be completed by December 31, 2001.

Summary of Rule-making Activity

The Maine Commission for Community Service does not have rule-making authority.

Comparison of Federal and State Laws

Maine's community service enabling legislation was modeled largely on federal law that defines state service commission membership, operations, and duties. As a result there are no conflicts between the federal and state legislation. The Corporation for National Service has few prescriptive actions. This was a deliberate choice to allow States to fulfill their duties and mandates in a manner that reflects each state's needs.

Constituencies Served

- Public agencies, including school administrative units, state agencies, health care organizations, municipalities (libraries, water districts, emergency services, etc.), and the university system
- Maine Association of Nonprofits and its member nonprofit agencies
- Service agencies such as United Way, Big Brother/Big Sister
- Governor and Legislature
- Volunteer and community service organizations, especially MCCS grantees
- Children's Cabinet
- Youth engaged in service
- Federal agency officials that provide national and community service resources

Efforts to Coordinate with Others

In addition to the MCCS, two other entities administer community service programs in Maine: the Maine Department of Education and the regional office of the Corporation for National Service. Under federal and state law, they must coordinate their activities with the Commission. Each has a representative that serves as ex-officio Commission members.

Examples of other successful collaborative efforts include:

- *Mentors for Youth:* The MCCS, along with the USM's Muskie Institute for Public Sector Innovation, coordinated what is now known as the Maine Mentoring Partnership (formerly the Governor's Committee on Mentoring Youth). The Commission realized its goal of establishing a state network of mentoring programs in the Spring 2001 when the Governor named the first Board of Directors and the committee became an incorporated nonprofit agency. The Maine Mentoring Partnership's goal is to increase the number of mentors for Maine children from 3,000 to 30,000 in three years.
- *Expanding Youth Service:* The MCCS works with the Youth Service Task Force to coordinate Maine youth service programs statewide. Just under 20 youth and adults representing traditional and non-traditional, formal and informal, school and community youth service efforts form the Youth Service Task Force. The Task Force's mission is for every young person to have an opportunity to contribute to his or her community through service. MCCS is also exploring potential coordination with the Maine Department of Labor's Workforce Investment Board, which has a youth service/career preparation component.

Alternate Delivery Systems

The Maine Commission on Community Service uses a variety of delivery systems to streamline processes, leverage funds, save time and money, and reach more people. Alternatives to traditional delivery systems include: contracting with others to provide services, fee-for-service, using volunteers, interns and research fellows, partnering with other organizations, sharing resources, and using electronic mechanisms.

Examples of successful alternative delivery systems used by the Commission include:

- *Volunteers helping Volunteers:* The Commission created and launched the Maine Service Exchange, a virtual technical assistance program where private consultants volunteer their time and expertise to nonprofit community organizations. The Commission also uses volunteers as trainers not only through the Maine Service Exchange but, also, for training and advising community service program staff.
- *Internet Technology:* The Commission's web site, which has a section for Commissioners with all their reference and working documents, contains information on federal policies, regulations, grant provisions for grantees, and information on Maine national service volunteer opportunities for the public. MCCS does virtually no postal mailings anymore. Its guiding principle is to post anything a constituent may need more than once.
- *Contracts for Services:* The Commission contracts for evaluation, outreach and public education, and training event coordination services.
- *Partnering:* On two occasions the Commission has developed a program and then turned its operation over to an independent group. These include the Maine Promise Network, which is now the private Maine's Promise Board, and the Governor's Committee on Mentoring Youth, which is now the Maine Mentoring Partnership.
- *Teleconferencing:* The Commission overcomes the challenges of geography by meeting via teleconference as much as possible.

Emerging Policy Issues

The following community service issues are likely to command the MCCS' time and attention in the coming 1-3 years:

- *The Changing Face of Volunteerism:* Maine citizens reflect the profile of volunteers all across the U.S. Research shows that the majority of adults volunteer five or fewer hours per month. Consistently more than half the volunteers have either started or completed college or technical school degrees. And there is a growing shift of volunteers away from sustained involvement in a community program to episodic volunteering with a shorter commitment.

***MCCS' Role:** MCCS will assist organizations with rethinking how they recruit and manage volunteers as well as what populations they target for involvement, such as youth volunteers and retirees.*

- *Growth in Retirees and Seniors in Maine:* There is an increased need for social services to help seniors live independently and stay mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy. With limited funding available, agencies and communities now serving elders with transportation and other services will ultimately need to call on volunteers in order to meet the need. At the same time, there are a growing number of retirees that want to do volunteer work.

***MCCS' Role:** In the context of renewing the Comprehensive State Service Plan, MCCS will engage both the organizations whose volunteer opportunities are attractive to retirees and the organizations that provide services to seniors in developing strategies to address this issue.*

- *Connecting Citizens Looking for Volunteer Opportunities with Organizations Seeking Volunteers:* Despite efforts by United Way and other regional organizations, there remains no consistently available and predictable mechanism for linking citizens who wish to volunteer with local organizations that need them. This lack of a system –an essential piece of community service infrastructure –impacts not only government programs that rely on volunteers, but also students' abilities to meet community service requirements for graduation, the ability of newly immigrated retirees to contribute as volunteers to their new home towns, and the ability of nonprofits to sustain or expand their capacity to serve citizens.

***MCCS' Role:** MCCS will partner with at least two statewide associations whose membership is largely nonprofit and volunteer organizations to develop basic information and referral systems. In its next AmeriCorps grant solicitation notice, MCCS will seek proposals that develop volunteer centers in commonly found community institutions (schools, libraries, job centers, etc.). Finally, MCCS will broker the resources of the Points of Light Foundation to emerging volunteer centers. The Points of Light Foundation's mission is to develop and support volunteer centers across the nation and it is the major philanthropic partner of the Corporation for National and Community Service.*

- *Increasing Participation of Younger Citizens in Community Service:* This issue has two aims. The first is increasing participation of 17–19 year olds in AmeriCorps as a means of helping them pay for postsecondary education. Through the AmeriCorps national service program citizens qualify for financial aid. College-bound students need service projects for summer or part-time hours. In Maine, the majority of community needs so far have predominantly required full-time service. The challenge is to develop opportunities for part-time service for this age group. The second prong is increasing youth service for high school students. While progress has been made, the agencies, institutions, individuals, and funders working in the youth service arena remain largely un-networked and generally work independent of each other. Ironically, many Maine volunteer organizations have expressed a reluctance to expand their volunteer recruitment to include youth because of liability concerns.

***MCCS' Role:** Engaging youth as volunteers is a priority MCCS shares with its federal partners since, like physical activity and reading, volunteering or civic engagement is a habit which lasts a lifetime if acquired before adulthood. MCCS*

will work with nonprofits and community education organizations to provide volunteer programs with accurate liability information and increase their capacity to manage young volunteers effectively. The Commission's Youth Service Task Force is working to acquire awards that accommodate part-time service. The MCCS has been coordinating youth service initiatives for three years using student interns, volunteers, and other substitute staffing arrangements. The challenge is finding time and personnel to follow through on these efforts.

- *Federal Proposals for Devolving National Service Administration to States:* Under several federal proposals, the elements of building community capacity, which are the hallmark of the current national service programs, would be eliminated. At the same time, the states' responsibilities would be transformed from granting and monitoring to direct operation of a volunteer placement service. AmeriCorps has been effective because it focuses its volunteers on work designed and planned by a community to respond to a critical need. These reforms would have a negative impact on the effectiveness of community service in Maine and on the Commission's ability to fulfill its larger mission to strengthen community service.

***MCCS' Role:** Commission members have contacted Maine's Congressional Delegation to inform them of concerns with these proposals.*

Emerging Programmatic Issues

- *Insufficient Federal Support for Grant Management:* The Maine Commission for Community Service housed at SPO administers \$1.7 million in federal grants for local nonprofit and volunteer service organizations. Maine's capacity to effectively monitor performance of its grantees and to ensure full compliance with federal regulations is overextended. As a result, it may be ineligible to pursue additional federal community service resources. In addition, SPO is close to being unable to provide the state match required for its federal community service dollars.

***Background:** The Corporation for National and Community Service is one of the many federal agencies that determines the size of administrative allocations to states using a population-based formula. This federal policy has the practical effect of flat-funding the Commission's grants management capacity because Maine's ratio of the total U.S. population is shrinking. Of the \$1.7 million handled by the MCCS for federal grants to local nonprofit and volunteer service organizations, less than 10% is available by federal regulation for the administrative functions related to awarding and monitoring the grants. Yet, the U.S. Inspector General has made it clear that states are expected to monitor compliance with federal regulations closely. Exacerbating the situation is the federal statutory requirement that each federal dollar for administration be matched by a state dollar. SPO continues to struggle with the cash match required for the federal funds. The Legislature appropriates \$53,000 in General Fund matching monies which is about half of the needed amount. SPO uses some in-kind match, but SPO provides limited administrative support that can be matched.*